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Area Bulletin 1990-1999

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LWV Bulletin, January, 1996

League of Women Voters of the Huntington Area

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January 1996

HUNTINGTON AREA LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

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January 15 meeting to discuss LWVUS program

The League of Women Voters, Huntington Area's regular meeting will be held on Monday, January 15, 1996, 5:30 p.m. at Enslow Park Presbyterian Church. There will be a meal of soup and salad prepared by Mary Anderson, Arrangements Chair, and donations will be accepted to defray the costs.

The program will be a discussion of the LWVUS' proposal on the "Initiative to Renew Democracy". Your input is needed as to whether you believe this proposal is the correct direction for the League to pursue and your ideas on how to accomplish it; whether you believe the League should emphasize a different program area; or whether you believe the League should adopt a new study. There will also be discussion on the present program of the LWVUS. The opinions of the Huntington Area League will be sent to the national LWVUS. Included in this Bulletin is the LWVUS proposal.

INITIATIVE TO RENEW DEMOCRACY

A Concept for Consideration During Program Planning 1996-98

All across the United States, evidence of a crisis in our democratic system is mounting. Frustration with the political process is widespread, and citizens feel powerless to affect the nation's agenda. Americans express less confidence in government today than they did ten years ago. Of those surveyed in a recent poll,* more than 70 percent said they couldn't trust government to do the right thing, and six in ten said the country is headed in the wrong direction.

Members of the League and the public alike are asking what they can do—and what the League will do—to make the system work again. They are looking for a sweeping campaign to revive democracy, restore confidence in government, and engage citizens in the work of shaping better communities and a better country. A League of Women Voters-led Initiative to Renew Democracy could be that campaign.

Proposed Focus for 1996-98

The LWVUS board of directors is taking the unprecedented step of proposing that just such a campaign be the sole focus for the League's national program during the 1996-98 biennium. We make this recommendation for the following reasons:

1. The challenges facing our country are such that the League cannot afford to go about business as usual. Sometimes we must break with tradition to address an overwhelming need—and this is one of those times. The League is uniquely qualified and trusted to help rebuild America's political and civic infrastructure, and only a concerted campaign has the potential to make our system of participatory democracy work for all citizens.
2. This initiative proceeds directly from the League's mission to promote citizen participation—and its 75 years of experience in doing just that. As an organization founded by those who worked to ensure that all citizens have an equal place in the political process, the League can bring a special brand of leadership and passion to this fight to renew democracy.
3. A single focus will strengthen the League by uniting members at every level around a common goal, sharpening the organization's image in the eye of the public, and building on the League's acknowledged expertise. At the same time, the initiative will strengthen communities by focusing on those issues of vital interest locally.
4. Unless and until citizens' faith in government's ability to act for the common good is restored, our efforts to achieve lasting solutions in the areas of the environment, social policy and international relations will be thwarted.

Finance Drive

A BIG THANK YOU to all of our contributors and to Virginia Hensley for organizing the finance drive. Our total contributions were \$1150!

Thank you

Gracious thanks to member Joyce Levy for providing her lovely home for the December meeting with the Legislators.

Children at Risk

Why Early Intervention?

The years from birth to three are a time of rapid physical, neurological, social and emotional development. Recent advances in the neurosciences show that:

*Brain development before age one is extremely rapid and extensive.

*Brain development is more susceptible to environmental influence than was previously thought.

*The influence of the early environment on brain development is long lasting and cumulative.

*In the early years of life, the brain uses information about the outside world to develop its interior functioning.

*There is new scientific evidence for the negative impact of early stress on brain functioning. This helps to explain why children who experience extreme stress in early childhood are more likely to develop cognitive, behavioral and emotional problems.

The initiative would include both advocacy work aimed at reforming the political process and educational projects designed to build citizenship skills and promote citizen involvement in civic life at every level. A comprehensive and coordinated campaign, it would emphasize strategies that can be carried out in communities in all parts of the country, building nationwide momentum for change.

Possible components of the initiative include:

- **Advocacy campaigns** to enact legislation that will strengthen democracy and the voice of citizens in shaping public policy. This could include work at the national level on measures such as campaign finance reform, lobby reform and other "good government" issues, from the budget process to constitutional amendments that would change the structure of government. This could also include assistance to state and local Leagues for similar work as needed at those levels.
- **Aggressive citizen education and voter turnout strategies** for the 1996 election. From printed voters guides to online information, the League can be citizens' best source of election information. Through the media and through grassroots action, the League can help educate and motivate voters, including those who are registering for the first time because of our success in passing the National Voter Registration Act. More than any other single measure, voter participation is the test of our democracy.
- **Issue-based citizen participation projects.** Leagues can capitalize on their understanding of the passion that a critical issue can arouse and build civic participation around an issue of citizen concern. They can help others become effective advocates—and meaningful participants in the political process—by sharing their balanced approach to issues, organizing experience, research skills and knowledge of the decision-making process.
- **Civic education.** Leagues at all levels could create opportunities for citizens to come together in new ways to explore public problems and develop effective problem-solving skills. Examples include roundtable deliberations on issues of community concern, dialogues on diversity, public policy forums, civics experiences for kids and families and electronic town hall meetings. The national League would provide training, technical assistance, and pass-through funding to enhance state and local League efforts.
- **Public journalism projects.** The national League would help state and local Leagues establish partnerships with media colleagues interested in providing citizen-oriented news coverage aimed at stimulating increased civic participation. Newspapers, for example, could feature citizens' views on critical issues facing the community or sponsor citizen roundtables to deliberate on issues being considered by the city council or state legislature.
- **Community assessments** of the strength of civic involvement. Materials could be developed to help Leagues engage citizens in examining their communities' strengths and weaknesses and in setting goals and developing strategies for strengthening participatory democracy. Promising strategies could be shared nationwide. An engaged community does more to strengthen democracy than any single organization, even the League.

The LWV is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to women and men of voting age. Annual dues, not tax deductible, are \$30 individual, \$45 for two in one household.

To join, send your check to: Ann Speer, Treasurer, 706 Ridgewood Road, Huntington, WV 25701.

LWV

Huntington Area

Bulletin

Sally K. Adkins, Editor

Calendar

- 1/15 LWV Huntington Area Monthly meeting
Enslow Park Presbyterian Church, 5:30 p.m.
Soup and Salad dinner
- 1/22 LWV Huntington Area Board Meeting
Beverly Hills Presbyterian Church, 11:30 a.m.
- 2/15 "Women's Day" at the Legislature
- 2/19 LWV Huntington Area Monthly meeting
Enslow Park Presbyterian Church, 7:30 p.m.
"Consensus on the Election of Judges"
led by Virginia Colburn
- 2/26 LWV Huntington Area Board Meeting
Beverly Hills Presbyterian Church, 11:30 a.m.

18th annual Women's Day at the Legislature planned

The two-day Women's Day at the Legislature will begin on Thursday, February 15, 1996 at the Capitol Conference Center and move to the University of Charleston for the evening and following day's activities. Keynote speaker will be Sharon Percy Rockefeller. There will be twenty-three Talking Circles, skill-building workshops and a new feature this year four workshops for girls ages 13 through 18. Conference participants will also be able to attend legislative floor sessions and discuss issues with legislators.

Registration deadline is February 8, 1996. For more information call (304) 558-0070.

Vote posters are available from Helen Gibbins, 736-3287.

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